

OCOTILLO WELLS DISTRICT

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Blowsand Reader

VOLUME 9 ISSUE 1-4

JANUARY—DECEMBER 2013

Kainan Rejtharek Returns to OW

By Callan McLaughlin, State Park Peace Officer

On December 29, 2012, Kainan Rejtharek was involved in a critical motorcycle accident at Ocotillo Wells. Through medical help on scene from family, friends, State Park Rangers and Life Guards, Cal Fire/San Diego Fire Authority, Borrego Springs Medics and Reach Air Ambulance, Kainan was transported to Desert Regional and into surgery very quickly. Though the prognosis wasn't good, Kainan was able to make a recovery and began physical therapy.



On January 3, 2014, Kainan returned to Ocotillo Wells to meet the staff who helped



save his life. Kainan and his family met at the Discovery Center where he was presented with a personalized riding jersey and then given a tour of the park. Along the way they stopped at various spots in the park for short interpretive presentations given by the award-winning OW Interpretive staff. The family then stopped at the collision site so that they could see firsthand where the accident had occurred. Kainan walked to the top of the hill and posed with family and friends—reconquering the hill that had almost taken his life.

Everyone then gathered back at the Discovery Center where Kainan was presented with a plaque and certificate making him an Honorary Ranger at Ocotillo Wells. Cal Fire and Reach Air Ambulance also presented Kainan



(Continued on next page...)

Kainan Rejtharek Returns to OW *continued...*



with more memorabilia. Kainan and his mom Jill both gave speeches thanking everyone for their part in saving Kainan's life. OHMVR Deputy Director Chris Conlin recognized Kainan, the Rejthareks and the emergency personnel for their heroic actions. Afterwards, everyone enjoyed a wonderful BBQ that was cooked by Dennis Raymond and Shay McGhee. The day ended with a lot of photographs, hugs, handshakes and promises to keep in touch.



The *Blowsand Reader* Is Back

Following a one-year hiatus, the Ocotillo Wells *Blowsand Reader* is back! This issue will cover news from 2013, after which we will return to the schedule below. We welcome all comments and suggestions for improvements.

The *Blowsand Reader* is published four times a year—November (May-October issue); January (November-December issue); March (January-February issue), and May (March-April issue)
 Publisher/Editor: Beth Shugan beth.shugan@parks.ca.gov (760) 767-5370
 Contributors: Ocotillo Wells staff, Friends of Ocotillo Wells, and occasional outside contributors

OW Welcomes New District Superintendent

By Garratt Aitchison, District Superintendent

Joining the Ocotillo Wells team has proven to be one of the best decisions of my career. The employees, volunteers, and user groups are among the best in the business. It's a team effort that will help us achieve our mission of balancing quality off-road recreation with resource protection. As I wrap up my first year as your District Superintendent, I am already looking forward to what 2014 will bring.

There have been a number of projects completed over the past year, with several more in the works. Installing interpretive panels, trail signs, and shade ramadas are a few such projects that will be ongoing. Dust control requirements, resources studies, and special events have also been keeping staff busy. Perhaps the most significant long-term project underway is the development of a revised General Plan. There have been multiple public meetings and on-line activities that will help determine how Ocotillo Wells SVRA is managed. We still have several steps to go before the completion of the General Plan, and I would like to encourage continued input from both staff and the public.

There have been a few changes over the last year in the management positions at OWSVRA. Among the new faces are Wanda Freeman (Administrative Officer), and Gilbert Alvarez (Sector Superintendent). Although not new to OWSVRA, Brian Woodson recently promoted to the position of Maintenance Chief. All three have extensive experience and have proven to be valuable assets to the team. Our approach will continue to be serving the needs of the public and the park.



Meet Wanda Freeman

My journey began at Lake Perris SRA in March 1993 as a Park Aide. Bugs and heat drove me inside to assist wherever I could. After several promotions, I left Lake Perris in June 2009, accepting a position as Administrative Officer I for Oceano Dunes District. I had my dream job working on California's beautiful coast. I promoted and joined Ocotillo Wells District in September 2013. So far, the desert has been good to me. My hobbies are traveling and reading.



Ocotillo Wells General Plan Alternatives Update

By Tina Robinson, Senior Park and Recreation Specialist

We Want to Hear from You!



The Ocotillo Wells General Plan Update reached its next milestone with the release of the General Plan Alternatives on December 10, 2013. A public workshop was held in the “Big Tent” at Ocotillo Wells on Saturday, December 28, 2013, with over 200 people attending. Another workshop with the same format was held in Carlsbad on January 9, 2014, with about 60 people attending. Online activities for the General Plan Alternatives will be open for public input until March 10, 2014, at <http://planocotillowells.com/>. Just click on the **Online Input Forum** link in the center of the page on the website to start the activity. Ocotillo Wells SVRA was divided into 11 different planning zones, and the public is invited to comment on each of the zones or just on the zones that are of the most interest. There are three alternatives: the Legacy, the Rugged, and the Developed. Elements from each of the alternatives will be evaluated to develop a Preferred Alternative. It is anticipated that the Preferred Alternative will be presented to the public for additional comment and workshops in mid-2014. After those comments are evaluated and incorporated into the planning efforts, a revised Preferred Alternative will be selected to move forward into the environmental review and general plan approval process with completion anticipated in 2015.

Archaeology at Ocotillo Wells

By Tricia Dodds, Associate State Archaeologist

Ocotillo Wells SVRA has a rich and diverse cultural past. For centuries, Native Americans expertly utilized the land and its resources in this area. Ancient Lake Cahuilla was one feature that attracted the Native Americans here. They followed the shoreline and exploited resources such as waterfowl, fish, animals, and plants that grew along the lake. In the eighteenth century, early Spanish explorers, including Captain Juan Bautista de Anza, led scouting parties in the area to search for an overland route to Alta (Upper) California. During the Second World War, the U.S. commandeered portions of the land to use for military training and firing ranges. Since then, Ocotillo Wells has become a popular recreational area for hiking, camping, and off-road vehicle use.

Physical evidence of many of these past activities can still be found throughout the park in the form of artifacts. Every archaeological site has the potential to provide us with an understanding of past cultures and what it means to be human, connecting us with our past. The OHV community can help California State Parks in its mission to preserve and protect these cultural resources. You can help us to protect the past at Ocotillo Wells with these simple reminders:

It is illegal and considered a misdemeanor to remove an artifact from the park or knowingly destroy an archaeological, paleontological, or historical site.

State law provides additional criminal penalties and restitution for crimes of archaeological site vandalism, theft of archaeological materials or artifacts, and damages to historic buildings and other cultural properties.

Although it is appreciated to pick up modern trash like plastic, papers, and cigarette butts, do not pick up potential historic items. Any object that looks like it is at least 50 years old such as cans, scrap metal, old ammunition, ceramics, and glass bottles should be left in place.

If you do find a cultural object in the park:

1. Do not remove or move the item.
2. If possible, take a photograph and document GPS coordinates or at least identify the location on a map or aerial.
3. Notify a Parks employee or call the Cultural Resources Department at (760) 767-1326 or (760) 767-1321 as soon as possible.

Active stewardship ensures cultural resources at Ocotillo Wells are preserved, protected, and made available for public understanding and appreciation today and for future generations. We are currently looking for assistance with the California Archaeological Site Stewardship Program (CASSP), which gives volunteers the opportunity to assist in monitoring archaeological and historical sites. If interested, please contact the Cultural Resources Department at (760) 767-1326 ext. 2.

New Arrivals in Resources

By Tina Robinson, Senior Park and Recreation Specialist

We've had lots of changes in the Resources Department at Ocotillo Wells. Most significant is the hiring of five new employees and the promotion of Steve Chaney from Senior Park Aide to Park Maintenance Worker I. Steve will be heading up our Resources Maintenance program, and we will keep him busy with exotic vegetation control, restoration projects, field monitoring of park resources, and fence or barrier repair and construction. He will also work closely with the Park Trails and GIS programs to locate on-the-ground changes. Steve has been an integral part of this program for the last few years and we are glad to put him in charge of it now.

Our new arrivals in order of appearance at Ocotillo Wells are:

Lee Shenk, Environmental Services Intern—After attending a community college while working full time, Lee was accepted to a four-year university in San Diego, CA. In 2010, he graduated from SDSU with a Bachelor's Degree in Environmental Science. He believes his acceptance to SDSU was due in large part to the algebra skills he acquired from his service in the U.S. Navy. His post-university experience includes forestry work where he performed timber surveys, vegetation surveys, and wildland firefighting. Lee is working primarily in our park restoration and biological survey programs.

Tricia Dodds, Associate State Archaeologist (PI)—Tricia Dodds has recently joined Ocotillo Wells as the new Associate State Archaeologist. She comes to us from the Southern Service Center where she worked for three years as an archaeologist at numerous state parks throughout California. Tricia received her B.S. from the University of Georgia in underwater archaeology and her M.A. from East Carolina University in Maritime History and Nautical Archaeology. She is also a member of the State Parks Dive Team where she fulfills her passion to protect the underwater cultural resources at Parks. Tricia is excited about her new position and is enjoying exploring her outdoor "office" at Ocotillo Wells and the cultural resources found throughout the park.



Left to right, Aimee Roach, Lee Shenk, Craig Fischer

Craig Fischer,

Environmental Services Intern—Born and raised in Chicago, Craig ventured into resources while studying at Marquette University. Working in Washington, Wyoming, Minnesota, and the south Pacific has finally led him to Ocotillo Wells. He's excited to be working with the resources staff in this remarkable southern

(Continued on next page...)

New Arrivals in Resources *continued...*

California desert-scape. Craig is also working primarily in our park restoration and biological survey programs.

Aimee Roach, Environmental Scientist—Aimee started as an environmental scientist at Ocotillo Wells SVRA in October. She studied Environmental Science at CSU Fullerton where she completed a thesis project on mapping plant response to water input in the Mojave Desert. She previously held a variety of positions from working as an environmental educator to biological field work helping to reduce cow bird numbers as part of a Least Bell's Vireo monitoring program. She has also done coastal ecology work, such as examining size and age structure of owl limpets in rocky shore systems and investigating community structure in various intertidal zones. Aimee loves animals and the environment and looks forward to getting to know Ocotillo Wells SVRA and to help manage the park's diverse and amazing natural resources.



Left to right, Steve Chaney, Trisha Dodds, Hayley Elsken

Hayley Elsken, Archaeology Specialist—Hayley is a recent hire working in cultural resources. She received her degree from UC San Diego in 2012. When she was younger, she spent many family vacations at National and California state parks which helped to spark her interest in history and archaeology. In her free time she enjoys hiking and has been taking advantage of the beautiful desert landscape in and surrounding Ocotillo Wells SVRA. She is excited to be working at Ocotillo Wells SVRA especially with all the history and archaeology housed in the park. She is working on cultural resource field surveys, project monitoring, and cultural resource data management at Ocotillo Wells.

Stella Ponce, Environmental Scientist in training—just kidding! On December 10th, Ocotillo Wells Environmental Scientist, Kevin Ponce, became the father of bright-eyed Stella. Since he and his lovely wife, Stephanie, are both Environmental Scientists, I'm sure that they will be teaching her all about the variety of habitats and wildlife that are found in San Diego's coastal, upland, montane and desert landscapes.



Stella Ponce

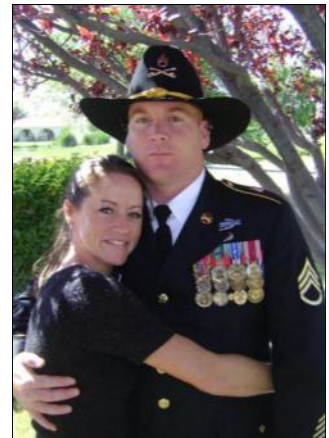
Meet Greg Bingham

Hi, my name is Greg Bingham. I was born and raised in Escondido, CA. I worked for Caterpillar for 14 years as the inventory control manager and heavy equipment trainer. From there I started working for a friend in the graphic design industry. I have always had a great love for the desert and decided to buy a home in Salton City five years ago. I live there with my dog/best friend Maddie. This will be my first full season with the state park, and I hope to be with this team for a long time. The Trails Crew welcomes Greg to their team.



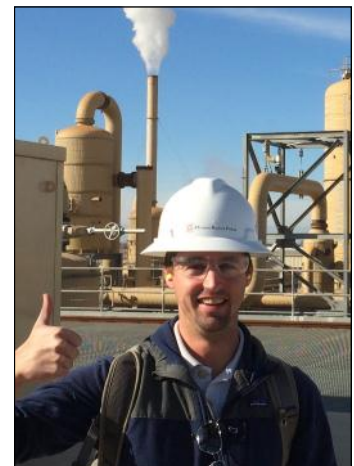
Meet Jason Fincher

My name is Jason Erik Fincher. I was born in Palm Springs, CA and graduated from Cathedral City High School. Since high school, I have been an active member of the US Army, the Nevada Army National Guard, and the California Army National Guard before returning to the Nevada Army National Guard. After more than 16 years of military service, including combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, I was honorably discharged. After graduating with a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice Administration from the University of Phoenix in 2010, I began working for the Bureau of Land Management, Palm Springs Field Office, as a park ranger. I also married my wonderful wife Jessica, and in 2011 we had our beautiful baby girl named Lexi. In 2013 we had our second baby girl Saige. I'm currently a Staff Sergeant with the Nevada Army National Guard and competitively shoot for Nevada's military shooting team. Jason joins OW as a State Park Peace Officer.



Meet Mark Kaufman

Growing up near Los Angeles' La Brea Tar Pits, home to the richest collection of ice age bones on our planet, stimulated my intrigue in the natural world. I was four years old when I first stared into the black depths of Pit 91. Eyes like saucers, I watched paleontologists meticulously remove tar from massive ground sloth vertebrae. Seeing the bones of not-so-ancient giant beasts shaped my perspective of what has come to pass on this "goldilocks planet," and through interpretation, I hope to help others better understand our dynamic, awesome world.



Meet Eric Christiansen

I was born in New York and raised in northern New Jersey. I moved to California in 2001 and enjoyed exploring the state. Prior to my career with State Parks, I worked retail and taught martial arts. I received my degree in Recreational Management from Cal State East Bay and joined State Parks in 2007. My first assignment was Silverwood Lake SRA where I worked for six years. I have always had an interest in OHV and jumped at the opportunity to work at Ocotillo Wells SVRA in October 2013. I am married and have one child. In my spare time I like to be with my family, hike, do photography, watch movies, and listen to music. Eric joins OW as a State Park Peace Officer.



Meet Mike Dipple

My name is Mike Dippel and I am a State Park Peace Officer at Ocotillo Wells. I have worked for California State Parks for seven years, mainly in the Southern California Parks. My favorite thing about being a State Park Peace Officer is training new officers and patrolling. Of all the state parks I have worked in, Ocotillo Wells SVRA is the most exciting! You truly never know what you will get at the start of each new shift. In my spare time, I enjoy hiking with my wife and barbecuing. I also enjoy surfing when I can make it out to the coast. Hope to see you in the park!



Meet Mary Downey

Mary joins the Interpretive staff from Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado where she interned as an interpreter last summer and fall. Trading up moose and mountains for desert sands and scorpions, she is very happy to be spending the winter with us in OW instead of her native upstate New York. After graduating with a Bachelor's degree in May 2013, Mary hopes to use her natural history and interpretation skills to expand peoples' understanding and connection with nature.



Meet Pete Coy

Hello, my name is Pete Coy. I am now in my second season with the Ocotillo Wells SVRA Trails Crew and very much enjoy the job and the team work attitude I find with the crew. I am retired from the US Forest Service where I worked as a wildland fireman for thirty-one years. Although my permanent residence is located in the mountain town of Idyllwild, CA, I really do enjoy working and playing in the Ocotillo Wells desert area this time of year.



Top Dog Award

At the annual DPR K-9 qualifications held last April at Camp San Luis Obispo, Handler Andy Ahlberg and K-9 Artéz received the "Top Dog" award for the highest levels of skill and ability. They were one of eight K-9 teams in attendance. Congratulations Andy and Artéz!



Kent Gresham, San Joaquin Sector Superintendent, stated, "Our K-9 program has a 44 year long, and very distinguished, history of providing the highest levels of proactive public safety for our park visitors and security for our facilities and co-workers." We are fortunate to have such a great team here at Ocotillo Wells SVRA.

Ring-tailed Cat

By Aimee Roach, Environmental Scientist

Despite its name, the ring-tailed cat (*Bassariscus astutus*) is not actually a cat. In fact, it is related to the raccoon. Similar to the raccoon, this animal is timid, active at night and during the crepuscular hours of dawn and dusk, and prefers to be left alone. They also tend to be solitary and territorial of their home ranges. So if you see a ringtail in the park, please observe and enjoy it from a distance.

The ring-tailed cat is native to arid regions of North America. Its habitat typically consists of rocky desert areas that are associated with water, particularly in the Sonoran and Colorado Desert regions. Ring-tailed cats can be found in California, Colorado, eastern Kansas, Oklahoma, Oregon, Arizona, New Mexico, southern Nevada, Texas, Utah and throughout northern and central Mexico, and just last year one was spotted right here in Ocotillo Wells SVRA. One of our trail cameras captured the first image below of a ring-tail at Tectonic Gorge, likely foraging or looking for water. Previously, a ranger spotted one climbing a tree during the day and captured another picture.



Ring-tailed cats are excellent climbers and are very agile. They have the ability to rotate their hind ankle joints 180 degrees, which allows them to climb vertical surfaces such as trees or even cacti. In addition, their large tails provide balance, allowing them to deftly maneuver over ledges, cliffs, and tree limbs.



Although omnivorous, ring-tailed cats show a dietary preference for animal matter. Small vertebrates such as passerine birds, rats, mice, squirrels, rabbits, snakes, lizards, and amphibians are important prey items. Occasionally, they will also eat carrion. Berries and insects are important in the diet year-around and fruits are also eaten during the summer. All of these types of food items can be found here in Ocotillo Wells SVRA, making it a potential habitat for the ring-tailed cat.

Trails News

By Shay McGhee, Park Maintenance Worker I

The Quarry realignment project was completed in September with the goal of reducing the maintenance issues with constantly shifting soft sand and also reducing the water flow on the trail during heavy rains. In addition, large RVs had trouble safely negotiating the “S” curves as they drove to the Cove camping area.



Martin Rubalcava on the left, Greg Bingham on the right, are installing snow fence for resource protection before we start construction on the Quarry Road realignment.



Adam Asche is cutting in the new alignment of Quarry Road.



Shay McGhee is watering the first cut of the Quarry Road realignment to keep the dust down and to improve the soil moisture for compaction after the grading.



Adam Asche is spreading base rock for the final touch in the completion of the realignment.

(Continued on next page...)

Trails News *continued...*



Ryan Walasek and Martin Rubalcava are digging holes and planting dead bushes to aid in future restoration to the old Quarry Road section. This process is a form of passive restoration called vertical mulching. Vertical mulching is a quick way to make the trail or road disappear and helps with the natural restoration process by providing some shade for seeds that will collect around the planted dead material.



The finished product.

OW Maintenance

By Karen Pena, Office Technician



During the past six months Maintenance has endured a lot of personnel changes. Many employees have moved on to new endeavors. Nevertheless, we have gained some new great help.

We were sad to see both Mike Krechmar (PMA) and Rickey Lizasuain (PMW II) leave our team. Mike has relocated while Rick was offered a job with one of the state prisons. Congratulations on your promotion, Rick! In spite of their loss, we are happy they are making changes to enhance their lives.



Congratulations Rick on your promotion!



Josh McCue was promoted to Skilled Laborer.

We congratulate Josh McCue, who was promoted to Skilled Laborer in November. Most off his efforts benefit our water systems. Josh works alongside Maintenance Mechanic, Chad Van Doren. Both of them work extremely hard to keep our park's water clean and flowing for use by both our visitors and employees. This can be very challenging at times. Chad and Josh have also been spending a large amount of time working with Superintendent Kirk Shea to oversee and implement the new construction at Heber Dunes. They have been instrumental in working with the contractors hired to build a more adequate office, maintenance shop, public restroom and employee residence at Heber Dunes. Their support was greatly needed due to the transfer of Alfredo Jacobo. Alfredo recently took a job as a supervisor at another park. We were sad to see Alfredo go, but happy he is moving ahead with his career.

The three new members added to our housekeeping crew are Ana Anguiano, Jose Gonzalez and Theresa Coy. We are happy to have them as they are a great asset to our Maintenance team. Our department also was able to welcome back two employees that were away for a while—Allison Boyle and John Freaner.



Jose Gonzalez



Ana Anguiano

Although supervisor Dennis Raymond has endured a lot of change in his department, he has not missed a beat. With his great knowledge of both maintenance and park operations, he has been able to keep the park clean and operational. This is not an easy task.

(Continued on next page...)

OW Maintenance *continued...*

In addition to the ongoing repairs and preventative maintenance, the maintenance crew has managed to add some new ramadas and build handrails around the Discovery Center deck for visitors to use and enjoy. They also added window tinting to many of the buildings to help offset energy usage and costs, while preserving interior furnishings damaged by extreme weather conditions.



Allison Boyle

Currently, they are working on the rehab of the Santa Rosa and a home transported from Heber Dunes. Both of them were in desperate need of repairs and upgrades.

Much of the day-to-day responsibilities and preventative maintenance in this type of department goes unnoticed by most. Often, items do not come to light until they are broken and in need of repair. There is a lot that needs to be done to keep the park safe, clean, preserved, maintained, operational and looking good. The Maintenance crew tries hard to provide the public a nice place to enjoy while visiting Ocotillo Wells, and they also do their best to provide employees a nice place to live during their leisure time.



Theresa Coy

A Special Thank You to TDS!



We would like to give a huge THANK YOU to the Tierra Del Sol Four Wheel Drive Club for their very generous \$1,000 donation. These funds will support our youth programs, such as the Kids' Adventure Connection and Junior Ranger programs for the 2013-2014 seasons.

These weekly activities and special events attract over 500 children who enjoy a fun-filled day focused on promoting safe responsible off-roading. In addition, it will afford all who participate the opportunity to learn more about the natural resources and cultural heritage that Ocotillo Wells SVRA has to offer.

Trails Installs Movie Panels

By Shay McGhee, Park Maintenance Worker I

The Trails Crew, below, is hard at work building and installing the movie panels.



Pete Coy prepares the movie panels for installation at the filming locations in OW.



Ryan Walasek, left, and Pete dig holes for the signs, while Greg Bingham clears the dirt.



Ryan drills holes for the rebar anchor to keep the sign in the ground.



Greg attaches a reflector to one of the posts.



Above are THREE of the finished panels that reflect movies filmed in the park, including *Desert Rats*, *Into the Wild*, *Bugsy*, *X-Files*, *Young Lions* and *Sahara*.

Dust Control at Ocotillo Wells & Heber Dunes

By Tina Robinson, Senior Park and Recreation Specialist

In 2012, Ocotillo Wells and Imperial County Air Pollution Control District entered into a legal mediation agreement with the US Environmental Protection Agency. As part of that agreement, Rule 800 of the Imperial County Air Pollution Control District's State Implementation Plan (SIP) was recently accepted by the US Environmental Protection Agency. Rule 800 requires that all public recreation areas that offer off-highway vehicle recreation in Imperial County have a Dust Control Plan. This applies to our two SVRAs and the BLM OHV areas.

The Dust Control Plan provides a menu of choices to reduce Particulate Matter 10 Microns (PM_{10}) emissions. These controls are required because Imperial County exceeded the federal standard for PM_{10} emissions at the Westmorland monitoring station. Man-made sources of fugitive dust (measured as PM_{10}) have been addressed on unpaved roads and parking areas within Heber Dunes and Ocotillo Wells SVRA. The menu of options includes lower speed limits, gravel base, watering and dust suppressants, and will be applied to our parking areas and the unpaved roads that we expect will exceed 50 vehicle trips per day. As a general rule of thumb, the heavier a vehicle is or the higher its speed, the more potential fugitive dust it may create. Our primary access roads that provide service to the RVs, trash, and maintenance vehicles are considered the unpaved dirt roads in Ocotillo Wells SVRA. The primary access road into Heber Dunes is paved. We ask you to help us reduce fugitive dust by keeping the large RVs at a slower speed while in Ocotillo Wells SVRA.

Rule 800 and the Dust Control Plan also address Special Events with 250 or greater participants. These special events may be required to provide a water truck for their primary parking or staging areas and primary unpaved road access, and will be required to do so if the site is not currently graveled or treated with a dust suppressant. The other option would be to enforce a 15 mph speed limit on the unpaved roads and staging areas. Special Events between June 15th and August 15th will be required to file a separate Dust Control Plan with Imperial County Air Pollution Control District.

The Dust Control Plan will need to be updated every two years and address compliance measures that were put in place by park management and operations.

A separate study is being conducted at Ocotillo Wells District to evaluate the effectiveness of dust control measures in various locations in the SVRA. There will be eight temporary air monitoring stations placed in the park as part of this two-year study, and different dust control treatments will be applied to a select number of trails, unpaved roads, and parking areas. As part of the study, different substances and application methods will be used and evaluated for their cost and effectiveness. The contractor conducting this study is RBF, and you may see their trucks and testing equipment while out enjoying the park. They are here to help us, so please give them a friendly wave.

Sky Lanterns

By Steve Chaney, Park Maintenance Worker I

Look!! Up in the sky! It's a bird....It's a plane....No, it's a floating ball of flame called a Sky Lantern, also known as a Kongming Lantern, Chinese Lantern or Wish Lantern. They are airborne paper lanterns that are used by Asian cultures in religious ceremonies and have become quite popular in the West after being showcased in such movies as "The Hangover 2" and Disney's "Tangled."

These lanterns are traditionally constructed from oiled rice paper on a bamboo frame with a wire cross containing a small candle or fuel cell composed of a waxy flammable material. When lit, the flame heats the air inside the lantern, thus lowering its density and causing the lantern to rise up into the air. Sky lanterns can get quite high in the air—anywhere from 1,000 to 1,500 feet high. Imagine being in a small plane making your final approach to the county airport at Benson Lake and having several of these glowing orbs cross your path.



What goes up must come down! Ideally, the fire goes out before the lantern hits the ground, but there have been cases around the country and overseas where lit devices have landed and either caused fires or forced motorists to swerve and crash. They are known to travel significant distances from the point of release which creates a serious fire and safety hazard because of the potential to start an unintended fire on or off the property from which they are released. A quick YouTube search will reveal plenty of lantern-related mishaps. Videos like "Chinese Lantern Fail" show lanterns being released, only to start small fires moments later.

When these lanterns come down in hay fields, the wire and bamboo slivers could be ingested by cattle or horses. If swallowed, the wire could puncture the stomach lining and cause extreme discomfort, and in some cases, have proven fatal.

While some states have outlawed the lanterns, they fall into a grey zone in wildfire-prone California. They do not fall within the definition of a firework (HSC section 12511) or a pyrotechnic device (HSC section 12526). However, several pieces of regulation and statute exist that will assist the fire agencies in regulating the use of Sky Lanterns. In June, the office of the State Fire Marshal released a bulletin under the authority of Health and Safety Code (HSC) Sections 13100.1 & 13105 to identify a potential fire safety problem regarding the use of sky lanterns, which are being sold at

(Continued on next page...)

Sky Lanterns *continued...*



various retail establishments in California (thus suggesting a de facto ban). For more fire-related info go to <http://osfm.fire.ca.gov>.

If nothing else, sky lanterns create unsightly trash that we are obligated to pick up, wasting time and monies that should be used elsewhere. In the past few weeks our OW crews have picked up hundreds of sky lanterns throughout the Park. The rice paper is supposed to be biodegradable, but how long will it take to decompose in this arid environment?

Seeing several multi colored glowing disk floating in the night sky surely is something to behold. But, beautiful as they may be, these little fire balls have no place in our state parks.



The Story Behind Rodney, The Off-Roadent

By Andrew Fitzpatrick, State Park Interpreter I

It isn't typical that an article in the *Blowsand* generates a lot of follow-up attention, but then again, the memorable and ethical Rodney the Off-Roadent isn't your typical mascot. Courtesy of our loyal readers, we now have a much better understanding of the story behind everyone's favorite cartoon kangaroo rat.



Rodney wants you to always be prepared!

In the hallowed halls of OHV history, our very own Rodney the Off-Roadent is a bona fide, ground-breaking figure!

Of course, such a compelling cartoon figure doesn't just draw itself—there was a talent behind the rascally rat. "All artwork was done by Borrego Springs artist, Barbara Young," remembers Mark Jorgensen, "Barbara worked with the four of us as a team to fine-tune the themes and details of each interpanel." The synergy of the teamwork on these panels is still apparent. Rodney and his lessons are fun, poignant, and applicable today—not too shabby for a rat pushing 40.

It should come as no surprise that the kids loved Rodney. Safety and educational presentations were conducted beneath the ironwood trees along what we now call

The story of our conservation and safety-minded little mascot begins with the creation of Ocotillo Wells SVRA in the late 1970s. The first small crew of rangers here was detailed from Anza-Borrego Desert State Park and was led by James (Ray) Patton and included Robert E. Turner, Jr., William B. Berry, and Mark C. Jorgensen. The park was new and just about everything was run or staged out of ABDSP then.

Working together, these four rangers developed a safety and educational program, the first in the state's new OHV park system. This means that within the



Rodney wants you to **protect** the plants and dens of desert animals, not destroy them!

(Continued on next page...)

The Story Behind Rodney *continued...*

Quarry Road (known then as Blowsand Wash) and were a hit. "The program was popular with young off-roaders," Jorgensen recalls. No doubt, Rodney the Off-Roadent would be popular with kids again!

Thank you to Mark Jorgensen, Donna Pozzi, Margaret Hurley and Don Solleder for their help with digging up the story behind our beloved and now revived mascot.



Always know what dangers lurk ahead!

Did you recognize these Rangers from the previous issue of the *Blowsand Reader*?



Mark Jorgensen, as an SPR I, in 1979. Mark worked at OWSVRA from October 1978 to October 1980, then took the job at ABDSP as the State Park Naturalist.



State Park Ranger Frank Padilla, Jr., worked at OWSVRA in the early 1980's, after our crew transferred to other assignments.

Heber Dunes News

By Kirk Shea, State Park Superintendent II

In the fall of 2012 construction began on the new Heber Dunes Ranger Station and Maintenance Facility, Day Use Area and Residence Area. The Ranger Station and Maintenance Facility will provide 3000 square feet of office space and shop space. It will also serve as the primary point of contact for park visitors when they enter the park. The Day Use Area has been constructed to allow visitors to watch family members ride their off-highway vehicles in the park, as well as the Youth Training Track, and still have a comfortable place to rest. The residence area will provide a home for the resident ranger as well as full hook-ups for the Camp Hosts.

This construction project will provide the necessary infrastructure to support the park's mission of protecting resources and providing high quality recreation. The project is estimated to be completed in early 2014.



Old Ranger Station...



...and New Ranger Station



Old Maintenance Shop...



...and New
Maintenance
Shop



(Continued on next page...)

Heber Dunes News *continued...*



Old Day Use Area...



...and New Day Use Area



Old Residence and Maintenance...



...and New Residence in dedicated area



Old Camp Host Site—no hookups...



...and New Camp Host Site

New 2013-2014 Visitors Guide

The new 2013-2014 Ocotillo Wells SVRA Visitors Guide, sponsored by Friends of Ocotillo Wells, was ready for the new riding season. You will find lots of helpful information about park destinations, riding safety, rules and regulations, interpretive programs and tours, and other happenings within the park. Pick up your copy at the Discovery Center, or for a digital copy go to:

<http://issuu.com/awodigitaledition/docs/ocotillowellsdigitaled?e=0>

We thank Salton City Hardware, Split Mountain Park, Luv 2 Camp, La Casa Del Zorro, Borrego Springs Resort, Blu In Park, Steve's ATV Rentals and Desert Tire Pros for their valuable support in funding this project!



OW Holiday Meeting and Potluck

The Ocotillo Wells December meeting and potluck luncheon was a fun time for all. Following a meeting led by District Superintendent, Garratt Aitchison, staff competed in a holiday sing-along, and a contest for the best fried chicken (see winners to the right).



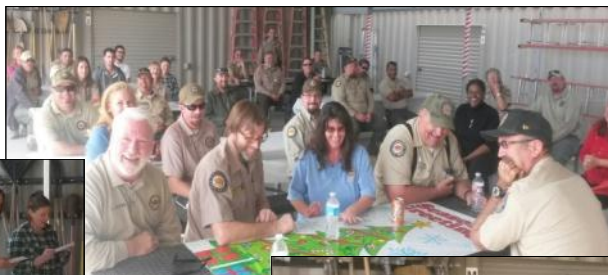
Most Animated Group



Best Melody



Chicken Cook-off Winners
Shay McGhee (right), First
Place, and Chris Dahl,
Second Place



Heber Happenings

By Jaime Mendez, State Park Interpreter I

What will you discover at Heber Dunes today?

Reaching Out to Bring Them In...

Heber Dune's afterschool Junior Ranger Club program is growing. Heber welcomes DeAnza Magnet and McKinley elementary schools to the club. Weekly attendance is now 100 Junior Rangers. Students are building volcanos, growing crystals, and investigating local habitats, insects, and birds.

Heber welcomes Jim Rue as the park's new volunteer ASI instructor. His classes will provide valuable safe riding techniques for ATV operators.



Holiday Door Decoration Contest

We held a fun door-decorating contest in December to raise money for a local less-fortunate family. Each department was asked to decorate a door using only items found in their department. Employees were then asked to vote for their favorite door by placing a donation in a container in the appropriate department. And...the winner was Visitor Services! They received \$108. Second Place

went to Trails with \$81. About \$500 was collected for gifts and a gift card for the family's holiday dinner.



Trails—2nd Place



Visitor Services—1st Place

Odor Inspires Salton Sea Exhibit

By Andrew Fitzpatrick, State Park Interpreter I

An outrageously foul stink crept across the Los Angeles metro area over a year ago, reaching as far west as Simi Valley and was even reported down in Orange County. You may have read about it, or you may have even smelled what officially was termed a "very large and unusual odor event." With disbelief, the source of the smell was traced to our neighbor, the Salton Sea.

Accidentally created in 1905 by the combined efforts of the flooding Colorado River and some amateurs building irrigation canals, the Salton Sea is one of the weirdest places in the USA. Its shore is over 200 feet below sea level. Now 40% saltier than the ocean, it is almost entirely fed by irrigation runoff. The Salton Sea is subject to huge seasonal fish die-offs, occasional avian botulism outbreaks, and to top it off, shrinkage. Needless to say, the Salton Sea has received its share of bad press and is often thought of, unfairly, as an ecological disaster—if it is thought of at all.

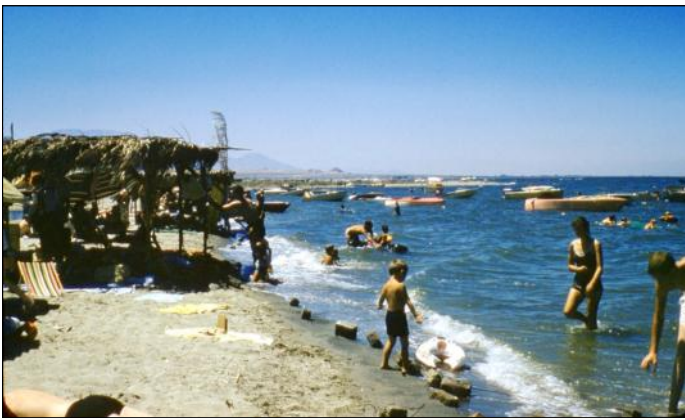


Photo courtesy of Angus McBride

Photos above and right: Salton Sea in 1958—in all its glory.



Photo courtesy of Angus McBride



Photo courtesy of Ed Bartsch

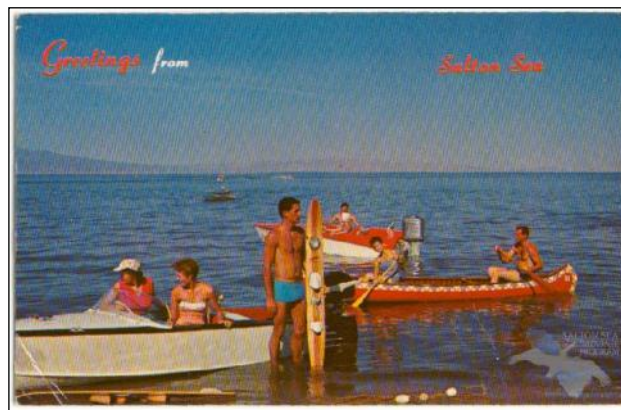
Left: Flooded Salton Sea shoreline following a large tropical storm in the mid-1970s.

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Odor Inspires Salton Sea Exhibit *continued...*

Ironically, this “odor event” may very well be the best thing to happen to the Salton Sea in a long, long time. The public’s attention is once again focused on California’s largest lake and its looming fate. Here at Ocotillo Wells SVRA, we noticed a definite surge in visitor interest about the Salton Sea—a place a surprising amount of Southern Californians didn’t know existed just a short time ago.

With the sudden interest in the neighboring Salton Sea, the field interpreters here saw an opening. Rarely do contemporary events provide such a perfect opportunity to harness public attention. The stink of the Salton Sea may be unpleasant, but it provides a visceral and tangible means to get our visitors thinking about some of the bigger issues facing Southern California: growing water demands from shrinking sources, climate change, and the impact of agriculture and development on the natural world are just some of the issues behind the “odor event.” The most immediate concern involving the Salton Sea is the fate of



Postcard courtesy of Salton Sea Recreational Area

Ocotillo Wells, Salton City, Borrego Springs, and the Coachella and Imperial Valleys if the Salton Sea does dry up.



Photo courtesy of Salton Sea Recreational Area

We decided, with all this in mind, to create a new travelling park exhibit christened “Secrets of the Salton Sea” to be set up at Gas Domes. From here one can enjoy a surprisingly pleasant panoramic view of the much-maligned sea itself. Since the best interpretation is insidious (you don’t even know it’s making you think), there is no preachy environmental message beating visitors over the head. Rather, to quote Dragnet, “it’s just the facts, ma’am.” Information on the sea’s creation and history, its water quality, its use by migrating and water-dwelling birds, and the future plans to save it are all provided and, naturally, questions are encouraged. A

variety of maps of the Salton Sea and its prehistoric predecessor known as Ancient Lake Cahuilla also grace the table. We even managed to bring the Salton Sea shoreline to our visitors with a sample of

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Odor Inspires Salton Sea Exhibit *continued...*



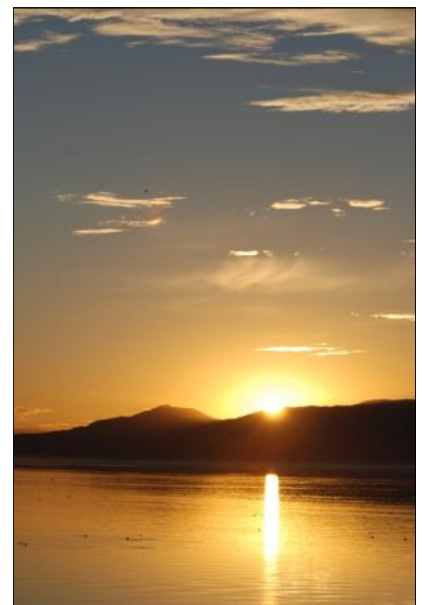
its modern beach made up of barnacles, fish bones, and salt crystals. A few pungent, desiccated tilapia are even provided for ambiance. Perhaps the most commented-upon items we present are the old, vintage photographs (many donated by our visitors and local residents) of the Salton Sea when it was a paradise of waterskiing, sport fishing, and family vacationing on the beach. To encourage our people to further explore this unique place, we also provide brochures to the Salton Sea State Recreation Area and the Sonny Bono National Wildlife Refuge, as well as directions to other local oddities near its shore, such as the mud volcanoes, Slab City, and Obsidian Butte.

As we continue to develop and refine this program, new elements will be added. A fact-or-fiction Salton Sea trivia game is in the works and will help clear up the misconceptions that have long afflicted this much-maligned body of water.

Taxidermy

mounts of tilapia, corvina, or other game fish that once swam the Salton Sea might join our exhibit. To encourage our more civic-minded constituents to help find a solution to the mountain of challenges staring down the Salton Sea, we'll even have materials from the Salton Sea Authority, a local agency created to advocate for California's largest lake, coordinate its management, and plan for its recovery.

The "odor event" spawned from the Salton Sea was unpleasant, but occasional fish die-offs do occur in nature because of overpopulation or decreased oxygen levels. If the Salton Sea does die, there will be unpleasant consequences for the migratory birds that rely on the sea for food and resting spots, for kayaking in the desert, for property values of the communities along the shore, not to mention increased dust events.



Interpretive Corner

By Steve Quartieri, State Park Interpreter III

The Ocotillo Wells Interpretive Department is excited to announce the promotion of Sharon Weil to State Park Interpreter I. Sharon joined the OW Interpretive team in September 2010, but her ties to her favorite off-road park go back 15 plus years. Since joining the team as a Senior Park Aide, Sharon has done an incredible job developing our youth programs. Her Junior Ranger programs have developed a “cult like” following, and her school programs fully book within days of being offered. We are excited she chose to be a part of the OW team, and we welcome Sharon to her new position!

However, we are both saddened and excited to announce that two of our interpretive icons have moved on to other career-advancing opportunities.



Sharon Weil

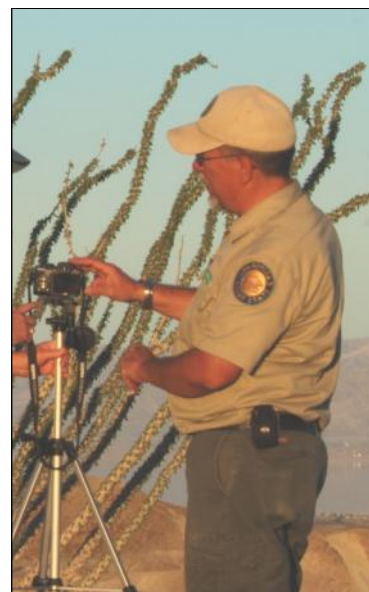


Andy Fitzpatrick

Andrew Fitzpatrick, aka Mr. Doyle, the Oil Man, accepted the State Park Interpreter I position at Providence Mountains SRA. In his new role, Andy will be leading the development of the interpretive program as the park moves through the reopening process. Since joining the OW team in February 2009, Andy created many of the interpretive foundations found in our program—the visitor guide, interpretive wayside exhibits, Radio Rock-otillo, interactive park destination displays, and many more. Andy’s contributions have been numerous and he will be genuinely missed.

Equally as missed will be Ken Conway, who has accepted a position as Program Manager for the City of Yuma, AZ, Parks and Recreation. Ken joined our interpretive team in October 2009, and he always inspired and connected our visitors to discover more about the subject at hand. His contributions to our celestial program and the creation of our annual Hot Stars Festival continue to expand and inspire those who carry on the “OW Laser” today. And who can forget his photographic artistry, which will live on in publications and in the State Park archives.

Thank you both for all you have done for our park, our program, and our visitors!



Ken Conway

4x4 Training Area Cleanup Project

By Brian Woodson, District Maintenance Chief



SPEO Dan Christensen works to restore the original look of a few of the hill climbs at the 4x4 Training Area.



SPEO Adam Asche and the Ocotillo Wells Trails Crew (Anthony “Shay” McGhee, Martin Rubalcava, Anthony Beepath, Pete Coy, Ryan Walasek and Greg Bingham) work together to repair the Log Jam obstacle.

(Continued on next page...)

4x4 Training Area Cleanup Project *continued...*



Members of the Trails Crew perform some fence repairs at the top of the 4x4 area.



Dan and the Trails Crew use a Hurricane Model 500 vacuum system to remove drift sand from the Little Rubicon obstacle.



Creosote Bush... Plant of the Month

By Beth Shugan, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation

The pungent aroma of the creosote bush permeates the desert following even the lightest rain shower. One of the most water-efficient desert plants, the creosote bush can gather enough water through its extensive root system to survive without rain for almost two years! Its roots are so efficient that no other plants are able to germinate nearby. Small, waxy leaves also prevent excessive evaporation. The creosote bush is one of the most common and important plants in the desert. The local Native Americans used the plant to treat everything from stiff muscles to snakebites—it was considered a natural medicine chest of antibiotics. The desert animals rely on the creosote for food, shelter and protection from predators, and the roots of the creosote help stabilize the desert sands.



Follow Ocotillo Wells SVRA on Facebook!



Find updates on changes in the park, historic and modern park photos, reminders about policies and regulations, and the schedule for our various interpretive programs. What a great forum for visitors to communicate and connect.

Check it out and “Like” us...because, after all, we like you.

www.facebook.com/OcotilloWellsSVRA



Upcoming Events at OW

Special Ocotillo Wells Event Weekends

Geology Daze @ OW

Tierra Del Sol Four Wheel Drive Club Desert Safari

Bug-a-palooza Festival

Hot Stars & Heavenly Bodies Astronomical Nights

February 15-17

February 28-March 2

March 22-23

March 28-29



Ocotillo Wells District

5172 Highway 78, Box #10

Borrego Springs, CA 92004

Phone: (760) 767-5391

www.ohv.parks.ca.gov